



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

**2007 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
RALLY d'ITALIA SARDEGNA**

**Pre-event FIA Press Conference
17 May 2007**

Present:

Sébastien Loeb - Citroën Total World Rally Team
Petter Solberg - Subaru World Rally Team
Jari-Matti Latvala - Stobart VK M-Sport Ford Rally Team
Manfred Stohl - OMV Kronos Citroën World Rally Team
Alessandro Bettiga - FIA Junior Rally Championship
Urmo Aava - FIA Junior Rally Championship

Welcome to the FIA pre-event press conference.

Q:

Seb, the stages have been changed considerably since you won here last year. What do you think of them from what you could see on the recce?

SL:

The stages are okay, not the same as last year, but it is very difficult because every year you have to make notes. For me, Sardinia, it looks really difficult in some parts, but there are other places it has tricky corners. Yes, it looks difficult but I think it is okay.

Q:

Are they an improvement from the stages before?

SL:

Some are the same but in the opposite direction. We try to do some good work on the road, and hope for clean roads. And conditions look good, for the moment.

Q:

Petter, more bad luck for you in Argentina; at the time you went out you were running in third: are you confident that your car now has the speed to allow you to finish on the podium here?

PS:

I think that things are going the right way, we are happy to be a part of this rally also. I think there is always more things to fix for the next rally. I really like this rally actually. I think I can fight for the top; I hope.

Q:

When you say fight for the top, do you mean fight to win or fight for a podium?

PS:

I will try to win. The increment is better, I don't like it, but it's better and hopefully it will be enough to fight and finish on the podium. We are getting closer definitely, that's for sure.

Q:

How will you go after Argentina, what are the positives you can take out of that experience?

PS:

You know it was a shock, you know, what happened in that race. You know I can't say anymore. Just to work really hard all the time to get on top again.

Q:

What about the reliability for this weekend?

PS:

It feels like we are a step closer since Argentina. Definitely we will be after the next rally.

Q:

Jari-Matti, you had an excellent rally in Argentina, where you got a brilliant fourth place, equalling your best-ever result. Do you think you can take the extra step and challenge for a podium here?

J-ML:

Well the speed in Argentina was okay but all the same the speed dropped a bit going sideways, or something like that. There are steps to get there and it is something we are hoping to get. I really hope that I can do this, there are some things we can improve, and I can improve my driving. Step by step we are getting closer to the podium.

Q:

You said that after Argentina you learnt a lot about controlling the car and controlling yourself there: what exactly did you mean?

J-ML:

Well in Portugal I did lots of mistakes in special stages, and also in the first special stage in Buenos Aires. And I realised it is important not to lose too many seconds. I had to change my style and concentrate for the rally. Running in Argentina, I learnt that it's not good to drive sideways. So there are things that I tried to make different. I try to do more straight lines and that's how I can help my times. It's a little more like a racing drive style but it's the way you have drive these days.

Q:

Manfred, it's been a disappointing season so far for you. Do you think that things will look up a little bit here in Sardinia?

MS:

It's hard to say at the moment. This said it's very difficult for Privateers this year to get ahead in these races. Not just for us but all Privateer drivers. It's not so good for the privateers. It seems like Jari or other pilots disappear from the Championship and it's not very good for the Championship. It's something we should think about and work on.

Q:

What has been the difference between this year and last year?

MS:

I cannot answer why there is this situation. Maybe the car is too big. It's nearly impossible to get on the podium. I can't answer the question why it's like this.

Q:

Do you feel as comfortable in the C4 now as you used to feel in the Xsara?

SL:

Yes, the Citroen - I really like this car. We have been working on the balance and everything, and I'm really happy with the car, it feels really good. It's an improvement and I think it goes very well.

Q:

Are there any other areas left for major development? Do you think the car is as quick on gravel now as it is on asphalt?

SL:

Now it's a lot more than it was. Everything is working well in the car, and now we just try to find a bit more grip, and traction, and everything.

Q:

We had the news recently that Subaru will run a third car for Xavier Pons from Finland this year. Are you worried that this will stretch the resources of the team too thinly to run three cars?

PS:

I think it is okay. You need time, you know. I think things can be good, more testing and more everything. Maybe it can just help.

Q:

How is the progress with the new car going? Particularly as Subaru has to develop the 2008 car at the same time?

SL:

Things are very very busy. Everyone is working very hard; we are still lacking a little bit of speed before we are there. We are hoping to sort that out in the next couple of rallies. We hope to work on the new car for next year. We are not giving up, you know.

Q:

You've had lots of experience of driving in Italy when you were younger, with the Subaru Cup in Italy – will your experience on Italian roads help you here?

J-ML:

I wasn't here last year, so it's a little bit difficult. But on the other hand I did Costa Smeralda Rally in 2003 with Subaru and in 2004 with Mitsubishi. I can say quite calmly that's this is okay. I have driven some stages, some kilometres and it's some of my favourite things. Sunday will be a good day for us. Friday and Saturday I can't get any advantage. Of course, this rally is important for us.

Q:

You've also got some testing planned for later on this year: how much will that help you?

J-ML:

Well of course, testing is very important in this rally. Because you can test, you can try out different things. You can test different driving styles and get the perfect feeling for yourself. I hope I can get a good feeling for the Tarmac events for the rest of the year.

Q:

What are your expectations of this event? Obviously you are fighting against the world's top works teams.

MS:

I can do my best and try hard. I hope we come back in the points, we wait for it. We see. Every rally finishing in the top eight is nice for me at the moment. But we take it like it is.

Q:

Urmo, welcome. How confident are you feeling on this event? The last rally in Portugal you had quite a lot of bad luck

UA:

First of all, hello. I am quite confident because we have the speed here. It is a different impression here – it's different but I am confident. It's tough on tyres and on the car. It is very easy to lose 5 or 10 minutes, after that it's very difficult to try to win.

Q:

You must feel that sometimes you have been very unlucky indeed. Portugal wasn't the first time that you have lost the lead. Is this a rally that is going to change all that?

UA:

We try to do something different, we cannot continue like this (Portugal). Maybe we need to slow down a little, wait and not crash too much.

Q:

How much experience do you have of this rally?

UA:

We have been here four times and I have quite a lot of experience but it changes every year. Not one stage is the same like last year. Friday is rougher than last year, so this will be very difficult.

Q:

Alessandro, this is your home rally – how does it feel to be competing here?

AB:

It feels like I've been at home because I have a lot of spectators here and some friends and even some marshals; like being next to home.

Q:

Is this a rally you like? Have you driven here a lot before?

AB:

Yes, I have been doing this rally since 2001 when it was part of the Italian Championship – Costa Smeralda Rally, and I had my second win here and another win last year. This is one that I prefer, yeah.

Q:

Do you get a lot of support from the fans here?

AB:

Yeah for sure, there are lot of spectators waving the Italian flags and it gives you a lot of confidence when you drive see flags and the spectators.

Q:

We've heard some news recently that you will be driving a Mitsubishi World Rally Car – what is your programme for this car and what are you expecting to achieve?

UA:

My program starts from Greece, and after that we are going to Barcelona and then to Finland, then in early August we go to New Zealand. We are saying that it is possible, but it won't be so easy to learn.

Q:

Are you going to be doing any testing before your first event? How difficult do you think it is going to be to make the step up to a World Rally Car?

UA:

It won't be so easy, there is still a lot to learn. It is difficult to set up a rally car. Luckily we have solved a problem at least for this rally. For sure it's not easy, but for the future it will get a little bit easier for our program.

Q:

How is the development of the Ford Fiesta Super 1600 going this year? You had some problems in Portugal, but do you feel confident that they have been sorted out for this rally?

AB:

I don't know, we will see on the stages. We did a test about two weeks ago, about 100 kilometres, and we changed a few things a little bit, we changed the rear springs. The car is now a little bit better, not much. But without it vibrating we see how it goes... it's a tough job ahead in the next few days. I think we have to race with the conditions and drive faster where you can drive faster on some stages, and then back off on other stages when the roads are not fast.